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Comparability of verbal and visual rhetorics – and the danger of statistical shorthands

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Résumés

Français English:

Cet article examine l'approche taxonomique de l'analyse rhétorique qui a été mise en avant par George Rossolatos dans le contexte de l'audiovisuel et de l'étude de marché. L'examen est lié aux aspects linguistiques aussi bien que cognitifs de la possibilité d'une rhétorique visuelle. Rossolatos fonde sa taxonomie sur l'adaptation des rhétoriques classiques faite par le Groupe μ dans *Rhétorique générale* (1970). Dans le but de créer un modèle systématique d'analyse de marché, Rossolatos et ses collaborateurs ont codé et classé un grand nombre de publicités audiovisuelles provenant des meilleures strates internationales de marques à valeur économique. À titre de comparaison, j'ai donné aux étudiants de premier cycle, pendant une période de quatre ans, la tâche de recueillir et d'analyser un minimum de dix publicités audiovisuelles, chacune d'entre elles devant illustrer l'une des figures rhétoriques mentionnées par Rossolatos. Les résultats indiquent que même les participants qui n'ont pas de formation en linguistique, sémiotique ou en sciences humaines peuvent facilement coder et identifier des exemples cinématographiques des figures de Rossolatos évoquées auparavant.

D'un point de vue pédagogique ou en termes d'applicabilité, cela peut être considéré comme un résultat positif. Mais cela peut aussi soulever la suspicion que les critères de Rossolatos ne sont qu'intuitifs. Une comparaison entre les résultats statistiques de différentes études de Rossolatos et ma réplique à l'Université Åbo Akademi entre 2016 et 2019 indique des ambiguïtés épistémologiques dans la conception expérimentale. (*Traduction en français par Svante Lindberg.*)

This paper will examine the taxonomic approach to rhetorical analysis which has been put forward by George Rossolatos in the context of audio-visibility and marketing research. The examination is related to both linguistic and cognitive aspects of the possibility of a visual rhetoric. Rossolatos bases his taxonomy on Groupe μ 's adaptation of classical rhetorics in *Rhétorique générale* (1970). With the aim of creating a systematic model for marketing analysis, he and his collaborators have coded and classified an extensive number of audiovisual commercials from the top international strata of economically valuable brands. For comparison, I have during a period of four years given undergraduates the task of collecting and analyzing a minimum of ten audio-visual commercials, each of which should exemplify one of the figures referred to by Rossolatos. The results indicate that even participants with no background whatsoever in linguistics, semiotics or the human sciences can quite easily code and identify filmic examples of the said figures.

This may be regarded as a positive result from a pedagogical point of view or in terms of applicability, but it may also raise the suspicion that Rossolatos's criteria are merely intuitive. A comparison between the statistical outcomes of different studies by Rossolatos, and my replication at Åbo Akademi University between 2016 and 2019, indicates epistemological ambiguities in experimental design.

This paper¹ merely reflects observations collected in a pedagogical context when helping undergraduate students to understand basic principles of verbal and visual rhetorics. In my capacity as lecturer of Visual Studies at Åbo Akademi University in Finland, I have given a course in Visual rhetorics every year since 2016. The participant's backgrounds have been mixed, but a majority have been marketing students from the faculty of Social sciences and Economics. One of the mandatory tasks, repeated each year, is to practise classification of rhetorical figures in audio-visual commercials. The classification is done according to George Rossolatos's quite recent suggestion for how an analysis of audio-visual messages could be based on the model put forward by Groupe μ in *Rhétorique Générale/A General Rhetoric* (1970/1981).² For preparation, the participants have read Rossolatos's paper "An anatomy of the multimodal rhetorical landscape of the world's most valuable brands" in *International Journal of Marketing Semiotics*, 2013. They have then been given the task of collecting and analyzing a minimum of ten audio-visual commercials, each of which should exemplify one of the figures defined by Rossolatos. With a participation rate of 15-20 participants/year during four years, the exercise has now (2019) generated a collection of ca 500 different examples.

1. A verbal framework: Rossolatos and the *Rhétorique Générale* of Groupe μ

Rossolatos's terminology and the general theoretical framework of his analyses is explicitly based on *Rhétorique Générale*. A work familiar to scholars and students of rhetorics, but probably less so to the general academic public, *Rhétorique Générale* is a reformulation of the systems and distinctions of classical verbal rhetorics in terms of Modern linguistics and information science. In my teaching, I usually explain the basic structural principle of *Rhétorique Générale* with the aid of diagrams and tables such as that in fig. 1.

Fig. 1. *The General Rhetoric.*

	Metaplasms	Metataxes	Metasememes	Metalogisms
ADJ (+)	<u>Accolorance</u> Alliteration Apocope Assonance Epenthesis <u>Reshaption</u> Rhyme	Anaphora Epiphora <u>Pareikonopoeia (?)</u> Parenthesis Polysyndeton	Antanaclasis Antonomasia Expletion Personification Synecdoche 1	Antithesis Hyperbole
SUPP (-)	Apheresis	Asyndeton Ellipsis Zeugma	Aposiopisis Synecdoche 2	Litotes Rhetorical Question
SUB (-/+)	Neologism Onomatopoeia Pun (Verb or Vis)	Anacoluthon	Metaphor Metonymy Oxymoron	Irony Paradox
PER (~)	Anagram	Antimetabole Tmesis		Inversion

Classification of some rhetorical figures according to the main system of Groupe μ in *Rhétorique Générale/A General Rhetoric* (1970/1981), with the addition of three multimodal figures defined by George Rossolatos (underscored). Table by the author (2019).

¹ Originally presented at the 12th conference of the IAVS–AISV, "Visual semiotics goes cognitive", at Lund University, Sweden, 22–24 August 2019.

² Groupe μ (1981, p. 45).

As demonstrated in fig. 1, *Rhétorique Générale* systematizes the different kinds of rhetorical figures in accordance with what is sometimes called “the four categories of change” in classical rhetorical theory – i.e. adjunction (or addition), suppression (or subtraction), substitution and permutation. Along the horizontal axis, figures are classified into metaplasms (figures of morphology, metataxes (figures of syntax), metasememes (tropes and other nuclear semantic figures), and metalogisms (figures of reasoning). All figures in fig. 1 are not placed according to the original classification of Groupe μ , as the table partly reflects George Rossolatos’s individual approach in his books and reports published between 2013 and 2018.³ Moreover, Rossolatos has added three figures defined by himself. He intends these figures and their definitions to cover cases of visual and cinematic rhetoric that do not easily fit into the classical conceptual framework. The figures in question are termed *accolorance* (or repetition of colours), *reshaption* (or repetition of shapes), and the more complicated *pareikonopoeia*.⁴ This latter term could be roughly translated as “the making of parallel images”. The commercial ads classified by Rossolatos as containing the figure of *pareikonopoeia* are characterized by a strong parallelism between scenes with a similar setting and similar spatial characteristics, but different actors or events for each scene.

Rossolatos’s more technical and lengthy definition of *pareikonopoeia* is “Employment of similar images with different senses; similarity is conferred by the employment of different actors in different filmic sequences/syntagms with similar postures, usually enhanced by the employment of the same production techniques (e.g. all syntagms featuring close-ups or medium shots or alternating close-ups/medium shots), who repeat the same underlying theme under different manifest narratives.”⁵ It is quite clear from this quote that Rossolatos considers the *pareikonopoeia* figure to be intimately connected to what he refers to as “filmic syntagms”, or the syntax of the sequence of scenes in a commercial. Therefore, I have allocated the figure to the column of metataxes in fig. 1, albeit with a question mark. Metataxes are the operations occurring above the morphological level in the rhetoric of *figurae verborum*, or figures of grammatical composition. However, I am not copying Rossolatos here. To my knowledge, Rossolatos has in his research never addressed the question if, and in that case how, it would be possible to categorize examples of visual rhetoric as either metaplasms, metataxes, metasememes and metalogisms. I have only found a small terminological remark, in which he defines the operation of substitution as one in which “An expressive unit completely substitutes another in a filmic sequence/syntagm, either morphologically or syntactically or at a semantic level”.⁶

Oddly, for a reader acquainted with *Rhétorique Générale*, Rossolatos here seems to exclude the possibility of partial substitutions. There are a number of verbal figures that would be categorized as partial substitutions if we follow the taxonomy of Groupe μ , but Rossolatos never clarifies whether he takes the substitutive logic to be the same for both verbal and visual “expressive units”. Moreover, Rossolatos’s definition of a substitution as a figure in which a unit “completely substitutes another” runs contradictory to his decision to define the figure of *synechdoche* as a substitution, rather than as an adjunction or a suppression. *Synechdoche* is hardly a substitution in the sense of a unit that “completely substitutes another”. On the contrary, it functions as the representation of a phenomenon by means of a selection of a sub- or superordinate level or part of it, as in the expression “chair” to signify a professorship; this expression still retains the material notion of the chair or *cathedra* in which Medieval professors lectured.⁷ This of course concerns semantics, but Rossolatos remains largely silent regarding the criteria for separating semantic operations from syntactic and plastic or morphological ones.

I honestly wonder if this silence is some sort of a strategy, on the part of Rossolatos, to avoid some of the most obvious epistemological difficulties associated with transferring the categories of verbal analytics to the field of visual and spatial analytics. It is hard to see that the very endeavour of finding visual analogies to such figures as anagram, anaphora or antithesis should be less problematic than any

³ Rossolatos (2013, pp. 75-89) and Rossolatos (2014, pp. 337-339).

⁴ In the Peircean framework for analysis of information design proposed by Nicole Amare and Alan D. Manning, both *accolorance* and *reshaption* would probably be defined as “decoratives”, or purely plastic qualities as iconic signs. Cfr. Amare & Manning (2013, p. 27 ff.)

⁵ Rossolatos (2013, p. 79).

⁶ *Ibid* (p. 83).

⁷ Cfr. Groupe μ (1981, pp. 102-106).

other analogies with similar *pan-linguistic* objectives. We should bear in mind, on the other hand, that Rossolatos and other scholars of a similar vein never intend to study semiotic systems that are exclusively verbal or exclusively visual. Their main research object is the multimodal combination of sound, music, words and moving images, as clearly stated in the title of the article mentioned above: “A Multimodal Rhetorical Landscape of the World’s Most Valuable Brands”. The format and aesthetics of the short audiovisual commercial for television and other screen media is certainly a most pertinent frame for studying this multimodality and its psychological and social impact. Still, in this research the linguistic model is often applied as a kind of blueprint against which other modalities are treated, and it is often unclear whether the signifying units attributed to visuals would be in any way salient without verbal anchoring.

Fig. 2. “Budweiser anaphora”.



“Budweiser anaphora”, figure 36 in Rossolatos (2013, p. 110).

Rossolatos's reference to some Budweiser commercials as examples of what he asserts is "visual anaphora" is a clear example of this tendency (fig. 2).⁸ Here, the "visual anaphora" is supposed to consist in the repetition in each filmic segment of either the Budweiser bottle or the Budweiser logo. Why a logo should be defined as a "visual" and not a verbal element is not even discussed in the article. Neither does Rossolatos discuss or problematize the implied segmentation which would make it possible to differentiate a visual anaphora from, for example an epiphora or a polysyndeton, (all three being metataxes according to *Rhétorique Générale*, cfr. fig. 1).

2. A visual framework: Groupe μ 1992

A radically different approach to the analysis of visual rhetorics was proposed by Groupe μ in their 1992 *Traité du Signe Visuel*. Fig. 3, taken from the *Traité*, has some obvious affinity with the model shown in fig. 1, but instead of a linguistic taxonomy the horizontal axis represents four levels of transformation that are operative in visual semiosis and in simple image manipulations. These are the geometrical, the analytical, the optical and the kinetic transformations. The term "analytical" here refers to manipulations of global characteristics of a picture – easily performed in *PhotoShop* or any similar editing program – such as contrast, spatial frequency and the extraction of contours. The optical transformations likewise concern manipulation of chromatic contrast.⁹ If then visual rhetorics is theorized from the point of view of a specifically visual and spatial conceptual framework, we will be able to identify figures of a rather different character than the classical ones referred to by Rossolatos. Regarding adjunctive operations, for example, the repetition of a Budweiser bottle tells nothing about how geometrical adjunctions, such as unexpected sizes of objects (*homothéties*), or analytical adjunctions, such as a sudden blurriness of a film image (*filtrages positifs*), can be utilized for rhetorical visual effects.

Fig. 3. Visual transformations.

Opérations \ Famille de transformation	Géométriques	Analytiques	Optiques	Cinétiques
Adjonction (+)	– homothéties positives	– filtrages positifs – indifférenciations – continuisations	– accentuations de contrastes – dilatations de profondeur – élargissements du champ de netteté	–
Suppression (–)	– homothéties négatives	– filtrages négatifs – différenciations – discrétisations	– atténuations de contrastes – contractions de profondeur – rétrécissements du champ de netteté	–
Substitution (\pm)	– projections – transformations topologiques	– filtrages substitutifs	– déplacements du contraste	–
Permutation (\sim)	– translations – rotations – déplacements – congruences		– inversions (négatif)	– intégrations – anamorphoses

Table VI in Groupe μ (1992, p. 157).

⁸ Rossolatos (2013, p. 110).

⁹ Groupe μ (1992, pp. 156-177).

Regarding the theme of the conference in which this paper was originally presented – *Visual Semiotics Goes Cognitive* – I think this different conception of the four categories of change in rhetorics is very instructive if we want to explain the importance of a cognitive approach. The four categories of change – adjunction, suppression, substitution and permutation – are indeed *categories*, operative in a taxonomic categorization. As clarified by Groupe μ in their *Traité* and later in *Principia Semiotica*, these categories belong to what has sometimes been referred to as Cognitive Types, or CT (albeit not always in the sense intended by the late Umberto Eco).¹⁰ One might say that they do not have any sense in themselves, but that they contribute to the extraction of sense from sensory input. They are not specific to any sensory channel or modality, such as auditory speech or visual images. On the contrary, they exemplify categorization as desensorialization. This is lucidly stated by Groupe μ in the following quote from *Principia Semiotica*; I have here attempted to translate the quote myself, in advance of the authorized English translation of the book that has been promised by the group:

Because the categorization occurs through a desensorialization, and is a product of thought, albeit of a more elementary kind, it tends to eliminate the sensory residues. This is the reason why it is necessarily a-modal.¹¹

For a more nuanced understanding of the multimodal communication that occupies Rossolatos and other marketing researchers, it would be necessary to address the idea that multimodality is possible precisely because of factors that are a-modal. In this manner, it would be possible to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of either the simplistic application of verbal models in visual communication research, or the stubborn denial of any parallels between linguistic and visual modes altogether. When working with students and coders in quantitative identification tasks, people like Rossolatos and myself will then be able to retain more interesting observations than those implied in, for example, the repetition of a Budweiser bottle in a commercial in which the voiceover or slogan constantly repeats the words “Budweiser” and “Bud”.

3. A statistical shorthand?

I also want to briefly consider the statistical aspect of experimental design and evaluation in the type of quantitative content analyses pursued by Rossolatos. As practised in sociological contexts and in communication studies, quantitative content analysis involves four essential factors: the validity of dependent and independent variables in experimental design, the selection of examples (or stimuli) and coders (or experimental subjects), the clarity of instructions for coders, and the measurement of reliability. The outcome and its reliability is dependent on the validity of variables and the clarity with which the codes have been defined beforehand by the researcher. From Rossolatos’s descriptions of his methodology it is evident, however, that his studies do not belong to this branch of quantitative content analysis. He relies heavily on corporate evaluations, such as the BrandZ annual report of the WPP group,¹² and defines the following methodological steps in a study published in *Semiotica* in 2014:

The first step in this exploratory endeavor consists of segmenting the selected corpus of ad films in individual segments with the employment of the content analytic software atlas.ti (see Rossolatos 2013c, 2013d, 2013f for further details on the segmentation procedure). The segmentation procedure of the 62 ad films from 13 sub-brands of the 3 key brand players that make up the selected corpus (the UK cereals market) resulted in 321 filmic segments (further details about the featured brands and ad films may be provided upon request). The second step consists in coding the resulting segments with one or more rhetorical figures and producing relevant descriptive statistics with the aid of atlas.ti, as will be shown in the ensuing section. The final step consists in applying multivariate mapping techniques and factor analysis to the content analytic output with view to examining the overall covariation patterns in the data-pool and interpreting the output.¹³

¹⁰ Groupe μ (2015, pp. 51-54).

¹¹ Ibid, 226. Also see Stjernfelt (2007, pp. 66-75).

¹² Thus Rossolatos (2013, p. 75), “[...] the con-figuration modes of the rhetorical landscape of the most valuable brands, as reported in BrandZ 2012 (WPP Report 2012)”.

¹³ Rossolatos (2014, p. 339).

In this article, Rossolatos mentions no criteria for his selection, except of “a corpus of 62 ad filmic texts from 13 sub-brands of the 3 major brands in the UK cereals market and 321 ad filmic segments that resulted from the segmentation procedure.” It then seems that his selection procedure is highly heteronomous (dependent on previous corporate evaluations), and probably partly dictated by some unstated stochastic principle. Apparently, the only coder involved in “coding the resulting segments with one or more rhetorical figures” is the researcher himself; if there is some stage of automatization and machine learning involved, it is not mentioned in the articles. An independent variable is brand type – “13 sub-brands of the 3 major brands in the UK cereals market” – but if only one coder is involved, the only dependent variable would be the “within-subject” one of Rossolatos’s own personal choice between a set of values (figures) in coding. No tests of either intra-coder-reliability or inter-coder-reliability are reported. From the point of view of a more strictly delimited experimental methodology, these studies must then be judged as merely “explorative” – a term which Rossolatos himself indeed uses.

My replication at Åbo Akademi between 2016 and 2019 is explorative in a similar manner. The only operative criterion for being selected as a coder is being a student in my course, and the students have simply been instructed to look for random examples at *YouTube*. The instructions for the task are contained in Rossolatos’s article and in my preparatory lecture. The codes identified by the coders are identical to Rossolatos’s definitions of verbo-visual rhetorical figures in multimodal communication. Part of the outcome is statistics of the reported incidence of each rhetorical figure, as shown in fig. 4, taken from Rossolatos’s second study from 2014.

Fig. 4. Incidences of rhetorical figures according to Rossolatos (2014)

Rhetorical figure	Atlas.ti code	Total	Rhetorical figure	Atlas.ti code	Total
Metaphor	[SUB_META]	12.7%	Apocope	[SUPP_APO]	1.5%
Personification	[ADJ_PERS]	11.8%	Paronomasia	[ADJ_PARON]	1.2%
Accolorance	[ADJ_ACC]	10.8%	Epiphora	[ADJ_EPIP]	0.9%
Anaphora	[ADJ_ANAP]	6.2%	Parenthesis	[ADJ_PAREN]	0.9%
Inversion	[PER_INVE]	6.2%	Rhetorical question	[SUPP_RHEQ]	0.9%
Hyperbole	[ADJ_HYPER]	5.3%	Assonance	[ADJ_ASS]	0.6%
Antanaclasis	[ADJ_ANTA]	4.6%	Alliteration	[ADJ_ALL]	0.3%
Pareikonopoeia	[ADJ_PAREI]	4.3%	Neologism	[ADJ_NEO]	0.3%
Irony	[SUB_IRO]	4.3%	Polysyndeton	[ADJ_POL]	0.3%
Reshaption	[ADJ_RSHAP]	4.0%	Tmesis	[PER_TME]	0.3%
Antithesis	[ADJ_ANTITH]	3.7%	Asyndeton	[SUPP_ASY]	0.3%

Detail of figure 11 in Rossolatos (2014, p. 349), “Hierarchical ranking of the incidence of rhetorical figures across the entire corpus”.

As seen in fig. 4, the *Atlas.ti* program for content analysis has been used by Rossolatos for a multivariate mapping of the semantic identity of different brands, and each rhetorical figure has been given an atlas.ti code (“SUB_META”, etc). The percentages indicative of “above category average incidence” of figures in each specific brand have then been used as input data for a correspondence analysis. The

correspondence analysis results in a measure of the “degree of semantic similarity” between brands and the identification of semantic clusters.¹⁴ Rossolatos concludes that “The above analyses are particularly pertinent for projecting brand image structures at the very encoding stage of ad filmic texts, by attending to how a brand’s semantic structure alongside rhetorical relations emerge in specific ad filmic segments.”¹⁵ This might be so. Still, there are clearly some unresolved epistemological problems at “the very encoding stage of ad filmic texts”. Rossolatos tends to put these problems within parentheses and to resort to a statistical shorthand or shortcut, with the aid of which he purports to advance rather far-reaching scientific conclusions. From an epistemological point of view, however, these conclusions are drawn at the basis of definitions and coding procedures that may in the end be largely subjective.

Fig. 5. Quantitative comparison.

	ÅA 2016-19	Rossolatos 2013	Rossolatos 2014
ADJ (+)	52,46 %	63,00 %	57,20 %
SUPP (-)	9,96 %	5,00 %	3,30 %
SUB (-/+)	31,24 %	20,00 %	34,10 %
PER (~)	6,39 %	10,00 %	6,50 %

Comparison between incidences of figures of adjunction, suppression, substitution and permutation in Rossolatos (2013), Rossolatos (2014) and Åbo Akademi University replication (2016-19). Table by the author (2019).

Fig. 6. Variance between the three instances of coding.

		ÅA 2016-19	Rossolatos 2013	Rossolatos 2014
<u>Accolorance</u>	ADJ-ACC	8,0%	7%	10,8%
Personification	ADJ-PERS	7,7%	2%	11,8%
Metaphor	SUB-META	7,7%	6%	12,7%
Irony	SUB-IR	7,3%	2%	4,3%
Anaphora	ADJ-ANAPH	5,2%	20%	6,2%
Hyperbole	ADJ-HYPER	4,9%	1%	5,3%
Rhyme	ADJ-RHY	4,6%	4%	1,9%
Alliteration	ADJ-ALL	4,5%	4%	0,3%
Rhetorical Question	SUPP-RHEQ	4,3%	1%	0,9%
Onomatopoeia	SUB-ONO	4,3%	0%	2,2%
Expletion	ADJ-EXPL	3,6%	1%	2,2%
<u>Reshaption</u>	ADJ-RSHAP	3,3%	4%	4,0%
Pun (Verb or Vis)	SUB-PUN	3,1%	2%	1,9%
<u>Pareikonopoeia</u>	ADJ-PAREI	3,0%	9%	4,3%
Inversion	PER-INV	2,5%	6%	6,2%

Comparison between incidences of selected figures in Rossolatos (2013), Rossolatos (2014) and Åbo Akademi University replication (2016-19). The comparison provides an estimation of intra-coder reliability (coding of Rossolatos) and inter-coder reliability (Rossolatos compared with replication) with high degrees of variance marked in red. Table by the author (2019).

If we look at the simpler statistical level one cannot deny that there are at least some indications of reliability in the procedure, especially concerning the incidence of the four basic operations, or categories of change, in different corpuses. See fig. 5. This table shows the results from the mentioned

¹⁴ Rossolatos (2014, pp. 348-354).

¹⁵ Ibid. (p. 354).

studies by Rossolatos as compared with my Åbo Akademi University replication. When we look at the incidence of each single figure, however, the results are a bit more problematic. There is, as a matter of fact, a greater degree of coherence between the Åbo Akademi replication and Rossolatos's 2014 study than between Rossolatos's 2013 and 2014 studies taken separately. See fig. 6.

Particularly striking is the extremely high incidence of the figure of *anaphora* in Rossolatos's 2013 study. Perhaps this outlier is indicative of a difficulty on the part of the coder (i.e. Rossolatos himself?) to separate anaphora from other kinds of adjunctive figures. We may also ask whether the lack of coherence between the 2013 and 2014 results indicate not only a reliability problem but also a more fundamental problem related to validity. What kinds of training and instructions have been fed into the coding process? Have the replicability of the instructions been tested in such a manner that they would, in principle, be possible to feed into a machine learning process? Do the instructions involve routines for separating verbal and visual dimensions, or, differently put, to identify in a systematic manner certain visual features that could be regarded as analogous to certain structural characteristics of verbal rhetorical figures? At least in the articles referred to here, Rossolatos provides no information whatsoever about these factors. From my personal experience with students as coders, there is reason to assume, however, that even when coders are explicitly instructed to look for visual equivalents, they tend to focus on the more easily recognizable verbal patterns. Exceptions would be the specifically visual or *plastic* figures of *accolorance* and *reshaption*. In these cases, the replications also show a comparatively low degree of variance: 1,47 for *accolorance* and 0,31 for *reshaption*, to be compared with 2,38 for *pareikonopoeia* and 6,46 for *anaphora*.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the taxonomic approach to rhetorical analysis which has been put forward by George Rossolatos in the context of audio-visuality and marketing research. The examination has been related to both linguistic and cognitive aspects of the possibility of a visual rhetoric. Rossolatos bases his taxonomy on Groupe μ 's adaptation of Classical rhetorics in *Rhétorique générale*. With the aim of creating a systematic model for marketing analysis, he and his collaborators have coded and classified an extensive number of audiovisual commercials from the top international strata of economically valuable brands. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that the figures defined in the Classical tradition, which originally concern only verbal discourse, are expressed both verbally and visually in the commercials. The approach generates a numerical mapping of the frequency and distribution of identified figures in the corpus. In this sense, it could be regarded as a statistical shorthand. A comparison between the statistical outcomes of different studies by Rossolatos, and my replication at Åbo Akademi University between 2016 and 2019, reveals some lack of coherence indicative of epistemological ambiguities. The criteria for classifying certain elements of visual editing and storytelling as analogous to certain specific verbal figures also remain largely unproblematized.

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